

NICK CARTER



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No. 1.

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Nick Carter, Detective.

By A Celebrated Author.



NICK LEANED FORWARD AND TOOK CAREFUL AIM AT THE DEADLY COBRA.

NICK CARTER, DETECTIVE.

BY A CELEBRATED AUTHOR.

THE SOLUTION OF A REMARKABLE CASE.

NOTE.—The following story was told to the writer by Nick Carter as being the most remarkable, and in many respects, the most mysterious case in his experience. It baffled the shrewdest detectives on the regular force, and had practically been abandoned when Nick Carter took hold of it. I tell the story in my own way and in the third person, but the facts, scenes and incidents are reproduced as nearly as possible in the great detective's own words.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER IN FORTY-SEVENTH STREET.

The city of New York was electrified one evening by the news that one of its greatest favorites had been foully murdered.

Eugenie La Verde had been found dead in her room, and the murderer had not left a single clew, however slight, by which he could be traced.

Mademoiselle La Verde had been before the public for two seasons as a *danseuse*, and by her remarkable beauty and modesty, as well as by the unparalleled grace with which she executed her inimitable steps she had won her way to the hearts of all.

On the evening preceding her death she had danced as usual, winning round after round of applause, and a deluge of flowers.

Immediately after the performance she had been driven to her home in Forty-seventh street, accompanied only by her maid, who had been with her for many years, and who scarcely ever left her presence.

The maid had attended her as usual that night; had remained with her until she had disrobed, and then, at her mistress' request, had given her a book, and retired.

Eugenie had bade her servant good-night as usual, adding the injunction that she did not wish to be disturbed before ten o'clock on the following morning.

At ten o'clock precisely on the morning of the succeeding day, the maid, whose name was Delia Dent, had gone to her mistress' room to assist her in dressing, and upon entering, had been so horrified by the sight that met her gaze that she had swooned away then and there.

Eugenie La Verde was lying upon her bed, clad in the soft wrapper which the maid had helped her to don before leaving her on the preceding night.

Her face was distorted and swollen almost beyond recognition, and in spots was highly discolored, where the blood had coagulated beneath the skin. Her mouth was open, and her eyes were wide and staring, even yet filled with an expression of the horror through which she had passed just before her death. Her delicate hands, pretty enough for an artist's model, were clenched until the finger-nails had sunk into the tender flesh and drawn blood. The figure bore every evidence of a wild and terrific struggle to escape from the grasp in which she had been seized, while the dull blue mark around her throat told only too plainly how her death had been accomplished.

The bed bore every evidence of a wild and terrific struggle. The coverings were tumbled in great confusion, one pillow had fallen upon the floor, and the book which the murdered girl had been engaged in reading when the grip of the assassin had seized her, was torn and crumpled.

Eugenie was dead, and everything in the room bore mute evidence that she had died horribly, and that she had struggled desperately to free herself from the attack of her slayer.

In searching for evidence of the presence of the murderer, not a clew of any kind could be found.

How he had gained access to the room where the *danseuse* was reading, or how he had left it after consummating the horrible deed, were mysteries which the keenest detectives failed to fathom.

Theories were as plenty as mosquitoes in June, but there was positively no proof in support of any of them, and one by one they fell to the ground and were abandoned as useless or absurd.

As a last resort, Delia Dent, the maid, fell under the ban of suspicion. But only for a time. The most stupid of investigators could not long believe her guilty of a crime so heinous, while, moreover, it was certain that she was not possessed of the necessary physical strength to accomplish the deed.

Neither had she the will power, for beyond her love for her dead mistress, the woman was weak and yielding in her nature.

Delia Dent did not long survive her mistress.

The terrible shock caused by the discovery of Eugenie's dead body was more than her frail strength could bear. She was prostrated nervously, and after growing steadily worse for a period of four weeks, she died at the hospital where she had been taken.

One theory, which for a time found many supporters, was that Delia Dent had been in league with the murderer; had admitted him to the house, and had allowed him quietly to depart after the deed was done.

But that theory was also abandoned, as being even more absurd than the others that had been advanced. Delia was conscious to the last, during her sickness, at the hospital, and just before her death she devised all her savings—a sum amounting to nearly ten thousand dollars—to her lawyer, in trust for the person who should succeed in bringing the murderer of Eugenie La Verde to justice.

The house in Forty-seventh street, where Eugenie had been killed, was, at the time, occupied solely by herself and the maid Delia, and the basement was never used by them at all. Once a month the man who examined the gas-meter came to attend to his duty, and upon such occasions he passed through the basement hall on his way to the cellar. But when his work was done, Delia always locked and chained the door which communicated between the basement and the parlor floor, and it was never again disturbed until the same necessity arose during the following month.

Eugenie never dined at home, and her maid never left her. Her breakfast, which consisted only of coffee and a roll, was always prepared by the maid over an alcoholic lamp in the room where Eugenie slept.

After the discovery of the crime, a careful examination was made of every window and door in the house which communicated by any possibility with the outside world.

All were found securely locked, and every door was provided with the additional security afforded by a chair. Even the scuttle had an intricate padlock.

Nothing had been molested.

Window-fastenings, door-locks, chain-bolts, scuttle and sky-light were alike undisturbed.

From the circumstances of the case as they were discovered after the commission of the crime, it was absolutely impossible for the murderer to have gained access to the house without leaving some evidence of the fact. Again, supposing the assassin to have been already concealed therein, it was equally impossible that he could have gotten out without furnishing some clew.

Delia Dent, as has been said, had fainted when she discovered the dead body of her young mistress. Upon reviving, she had staggered to a messenger call in the hallway, having barely strength to ring for the police. Then, still half-fainting, she had managed to reach the foot of the stairs, but had not yet unchained the front door when her call was answered. She believed that she fainted twice, or that she was in a state of semi-consciousness during the interval that elapsed between the discovery of the crime and the arrival of the police.

The more thorough the investigation, the deeper grew the mystery.

Old and tried detectives were put upon the case. At first they looked wise and assured everybody of the speedy apprehension of the fiend who had committed the deed. Then they became puzzled, and finally utterly confounded. The bravest of them at last confessed that they were no nearer the truth than at the beginning, and one of them, the shrewdest of all, boldly stated that the only way in

which the assassin would ever be discovered would be by his voluntary confession, which was not likely to ensue.

Thus matters drifted on until the public mind found other things to think of. The papers at first devoted pages to the event; then a few columns. In a week, one column sufficed. Finally the reports dwindled down to a single comment, and then to nothing, and the mysterious murder was practically relegated to history and forgotten.

There was one, however, who had not forgotten it, and that one was the Inspector in Chief, at Police Headquarters.

Every resource at his command had been exhausted. His best men had taken the case in hand and failed. He had personally given all the time he could spare from his other duties to the murder of Eugenie La Verde, and was yet as greatly mystified as ever. There was no palpable or reasonable solution to the problem.

Her jewels, of great value, were found untouched upon the dressing-case. A roll of bills amounting to several hundred dollars was in the top drawer, where it had evidently been carelessly thrown by the murdered girl that very night.

The murderer had doubtless approached stealthily, giving her no warning. He had seized her in his vise-like grip, choked her to death, and left her as stealthily as he had come. Her body was undefiled by bruises, contusions, or other marks, showing that he had given his attention solely to the work of killing. It was even evident that he had not sought to put a stop to her struggles by the exercise of physical violence, other than that of choking his victim.

The marks upon her throat were peculiar and very striking.

Some of the detectives thought that the assassin had used both hands simultaneously; others believed that he had made use of a rope, holding one end in either hand and winding it twice around her neck.

There was one fact which seemed to upset every theory that was advanced. The door between the room and the hall-way was closed, although not locked.

The bed on which Eugenie was murdered was so situated that it would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to enter the room without being seen by her. The gas was brilliantly lighted, and was so found in the morning after the crime. Delia Dent had never known her mistress to fall asleep while reading, or to neglect to extinguish the gas when ready to compose herself for the night.

Was there a third person in the house, whose presence was known to her alone?

Preposterous! Delia could not have failed to be aware of such a fact, and the person could not have left the house without being discovered, or leaving traces of his manner of exit.

Nothing had ever been whispered against the character of Eugenie La Verde, and the coroner's inquest proved that she had been worthy of her reputation for modesty and purity.

The crime was a month old when, one evening shortly after dark, Inspector Byrnes went quietly up the steps of Nick Carter's residence.

Everybody believed that the chief had given the matter up, and he was perfectly willing that the public should have that opinion.

In the meantime, he had decided that there was one man in New York who might be able to solve the mystery.

Hence, his quiet call upon Nick Carter.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW.

Nick Carter was at home when the inspector called, and he received him as he would have received no other man in the whole city of New York; in his own proper person. One of the cardinal points of Nick's faith in himself was that by keeping himself entirely unknown to everybody his various disguises were rendered absolutely impenetrable.

"I am glad to see you, inspector," was his greeting to the chief. "Sit down, help yourself to a cigar and we will talk it all over, for I suppose you are here on business."

"You are right, Nick."

"You never come unless there is something of importance on hand. What is it to-night?"

"The Eugenie La Verde affair."

"Why, I thought that was given up."

"So it is—by everybody except myself."

"Ah! By the way, I see that—"

"That Delia Dent is dead? Yes."

"Do you take any stock in her knowing aught of the murder, inspector?"

"None whatever. She was as innocent as you, or I."

"My opinion, although of course I know nothing about the case."

"Have you a theory, Nick?"

"No. I avoid theories as I do the typhus or the small-pox. They are dangerous and very 'catching.'"

"Exactly. Still one thinks."

"Yes—unfortunately."

"Nick, I want you to take this matter in hand and sift it to the bottom."

"Easier said than done, inspector."

"I believe that you can do it."

"It is a very blind case."

"Everybody else has failed. Will you try it, Nick? There is a murderer somewhere, and he must be found if it takes years to do it. Will you try it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I feared that you would refuse, and yet—"

"I may want a favor sometime, eh?"

"Precisely."

"When am I to begin, and what are your instructions?"

"Begin when you choose, and follow your own bent independently of everybody. I have only one order to give."

"What is that?"

"That no one but ourselves must know that you are on the case."

"I should have made that point a condition of my taking it, inspector."

"You are familiar with the details of the case, I suppose?"

"Yes, sufficiently to begin, unless you have some particular pointer to give me."

"No, there are no pointers in the case."

"Humph! Did Eugenie have any relatives living?"

"Yes; a mother."

"She left some property, did she not?"

"Yes, her mother inherits. I have not learned very much regarding her connections."

"What becomes of the house? Did she own it?"

"Yes. It is at present locked and deserted."

"Ah—and you have the key?"

"Certainly."

"Will you give it to me."

"Yes. I have it with me. Here it is."

"Good. While I am at work upon the case, inspector, will you see that the house remains undisturbed?"

"I will."

"Did the newspapers recount everything concerning the murder correctly?"

"Oh, yes. There was so little to say regarding the surroundings, that I am sure they covered the ground."

"You looked for trap-doors, sliding panels, movable casings, and all such things, I suppose?"

"Certainly. We looked very thoroughly."

"And found nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Still, it will do no harm for me to have a try."

"Certainly not."

"I have found such things in houses where I least expected them before now. It may be that I will find something of the kind there."

"It may be."

"But you do not think so?"

"No, frankly, I do not."

"And yet, how else could the murderer have entered and left the house?"

"My dear Nick, I have asked myself that question at least ten thousand times."

"And found no answer?"

"None."

"Well, I'm inclined to the belief that I will find something of the kind there."

"I hope you will."

"The case stands this way. A girl was murdered. To have been murdered it seems probable that a stranger gained access to her room."

"Yes."

"And yet the condition in which the house was found was such that it is apparently impossible that any one did enter or leave the house after Delia Dent left her mistress that night."

"Precisely."

"Therefore it must have been by some means or method of which you are ignorant."

"Of course."

"How then, if not by a secret door, sliding panel, or some like contrivance?"

"That is the question. How, then?"

"Well, that is then the first thing that I am going to look for."

"And the next?"

"Will depend upon my success with the first. Is that all, inspector?"

"Nearly. You will find the house exactly as I found it when I first went there to investigate; and now, good-night, Nick," continued the inspector, rising, and taking a large envelope from his pocket.

"This," he said, "contains the entire case from first to last, and you may read it over at your own convenience. Nothing is omitted, and yet very little is said that is worth reading."

"It is that Eugenie La Verde was choked to death, and that the murderer escaped and left not the slightest clew as to his identity or his haunts."

"Exactly. And now you must find him."

"I will try."

"If anybody can succeed, you can and will."

"Thanks; I will try."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

The door closed, and the great director of detectives was gone.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CLEW.

On the following morning Nick went at once to Eugenie La Verde's house in Forty-seventh street, disguised as a plumber.

The room which she had formerly occupied was nearly in the same condition in which it had been found on the morning after the murder, and a careful search offered no immediate suggestion to the detective.

From the sleeping room, he passed to the parlor floor, where he inspected all of the window-catches and appliances, casings, and panels.

Again without result.

Presently, he approached the stairs which led from the parlor floor to that below.

The door of communication was at the foot of the stairs, and was both locked and chained on the inner, or parlor-floor side.

There was nothing faulty about either the lock, chain, or door. They were evidently perfect, and he turned his attention to the stairs.

Stair-ways are convenient arrangements through which to construct a secret passage-way, and Nick never neglected them.

Suddenly he made a discovery. The third step from the bottom was not secure in its place.

For more than two hours he continued the search, but without further result.

It was nearly dark when Nick was reminded of the fact that he was hungry, and he quietly left the house in search of a convenient restaurant.

Two blocks away he found a beer saloon, which advertised meals at all hours.

Having entered and ordered what he wanted, he was presently engaged in eating it, when two swarthy, ill-conditioned fellows entered the saloon and seated themselves at the second table from him.

The very first words uttered by the men caused him to listen attentively:

"Captain, Inspector Byrnes made a call last night."

"Where?" asked the one addressed as captain.

"Upon that devil of a detective. I don't care to mention his name here."

"Ah; the one whom Sindahr calls 'the little giant?'"

"Exactly."

"Well, what of it?"

"It may be that he has set him upon us."

"Bah! No. There are no reasons for that. The inspector does not even know that we exist."

"He knows most things."

"Yes, but nothing of us. Still it may be well to—did you watch for the 'little giant?'"

"Yes."

"Has he gone out?"

"One never can tell, but I think not. I left there an hour ago, and Tony has taken my place. I could swear that he had not left the house when I came away."

Nick smiled.

"Come, John," said the captain. "We have been here long enough and we have other work to do. It is dark now. Come."

They rose quickly and left the place, and upon the instant Nick decided to shadow them.

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWING.

Nick did not rush from the saloon as soon as the two men left, but sauntered carelessly to the bar, paid for what he had eaten and drank, and then went slowly out.

As he had suspected, they were not far away. They were standing upon the curbstone apparently engaged in earnest conversation, but in reality waiting to see if they would be followed.

The fact that they were so cautious, gave added zest to the chase.

Nick sauntered carelessly past them, to the avenue which was only about two hundred feet farther on.

A hall-way door between two stores stood conveniently ajar on the opposite side, and he entered it with the air of one who lived there.

Pausing in the dark hall-way, he began a rapid change in his disguise, and presently he looked like an old man in poor circumstances who worked hard all day, and took an airing and a glass or two of toddy in the evening.

Five or ten minutes passed, and then the two men suddenly separated, the one called John going away rapidly in the opposite direction, and the captain jumped upon a car that was passing at that moment.

He took his stand upon the rear platform with his back toward the car, as though he thought that he might be followed.

A car was coming up the avenue. It had to pass between Nick and the car that the captain had boarded.

For a moment, Nick would be screened from view from the platform of the down-town car.

He utilized that moment to the best advantage.

He leaped nimbly into the street and succeeded in getting two doors away before the cars had passed each other.

When they had passed, he was standing idly before the door of a "gin-mill" leisurely picking his teeth, as though he had just come out.

Presently he walked down the street, rather rapidly, to be sure, but not fast enough to excite the suspicion that he was following anybody.

Soon a second car overtook him, and he got upon the front platform.

The two cars were less than a block apart, and the detective could see his man easily.

At Fourteenth street the captain turned and abruptly entered the car on which he was riding and passed out upon the front platform.

Here the spasmodic flashing of a match presently denoted that he was lighting a cigar.

Then, with a quick run, Nick left his car and overtook the one in which the captain was a passenger, and going inside, seated himself at the forward end.

"This is more comfortable," he thought. "It is much less work to watch him from here."

Block after block was passed, but the captain showed no sign of leaving the car, nor did he, until it reached the end of the route at the Astor House.

Then he stepped off and boarded a south-bound Broadway car, upon which he remained until it reached South Ferry.

There the captain took the Hamilton Ferry boat, landed in Brooklyn, and started away down the street along the water-front.

Nick followed for a mile or more, when suddenly the captain turned and went out upon a pier.

"He will stop and look around when he gets out there," thought Nick, "so I will wait here."

He dodged into a deep shadow close to the water's edge, just where a boat was tied by a rope to a cleat upon the dock.

"The very thing!" thought Nick.

In an instant he had untied the rope and seized one of the oars; the next, he was sculling the little craft rapidly and silently along in the shadow of the pier.

Suddenly the man whom he was following, paused. Then turning, he came to the edge of the pier and looked over, full at Nick.

CHAPTER V.

TRAPPED.

"Hey, there!" said the captain, in a voice loud enough for Nick to hear, and yet with considerable caution.

Nick ceased sculling, but did not reply.

"Do you want to earn a dollar or two?" was the first question.

"Sure!" was Nick's laconic reply.

"Take me aboard, then."

"What fur?"

"I want to go down the bay a little way."

"Ye've struck the wrong party, boss. I ain't on that kind of a lay."

"I'll make it five."

"How fur d'ye want to go?"

"About half a mile."

"What fur?"

"That's my business. Come, will you take me or won't you? I can't stand here arguing all night."

"Cops after you, boss?"

The man shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"I'll take ye ef it ain't too fur," called Nick. "Climb in."

The captain returned. The boat was drawn up close to the dock, and with a quick spring the stranger alighted upon one of the midship seats.

"Now make haste," he ordered.

"Which way, boss?"

"Down."

"How fur?"

"Go until I tell you to stop."

Nick obeyed.

The tide was with them and was running like a mill-race, so that they made quick time, and a mile was passed over in silence.

Then Nick stopped rowing.

"Say, boss," he remarked, "you said half a mile, an' we've already come over a mile. Is the place much furdur?"

"Only a little way. Row on."

"Well, I want my five dollars afore I go any furdur."

"You do, eh? Well, look at this."

He was pointing a six-shooter directly at Nick's heart.

"I'm a-lookin'," said Nick, coolly, "but that ain't no five dollars."

"Will you row on?"

"No, not till I gits me pay."

"Curse you, do as I tell you or I'll put a hole in you big enough to see through."

Nick calmly drew the oars into the boat.

"Look ahere," he said, "wot d'ye take me fur, anyhow, boss? D'ye think that I'm a rabbit that I'm afraid o' that pop-gun o' yourn? Not much! Don't ye s'pose I know ye dassent use it out here at this time o' night? It's

too early for killin', boss. I've done a job 'r two of that kind myself, an' I'm posted. Fork over, an' I'll row ye where ye want to go, but I'm blowed ef I will ef ye don't, see?"

The passenger growled out something which sounded very much like a curse, but he drew a gold piece from his pocket and flung it to Nick.

"Now go ahead," he muttered, "for I'm losing time."

"Nobody's fault but yer own," was Nick's reply, and then he seized the oars and the boat shot ahead again.

"Easy, there, easy," said the passenger, suddenly. "Do you see that sloop yonder?"

"I do."

"Put me aboard of her."

"Keyreckt, boss. I've had my eye on her before."

"You have, eh? Why?"

"That's my bizness, see? To have my eye on such things."

"Ah! a river pirate, eh?"

"Me? Oh, no! I'm a harbor-broker. Here you are. Ketch hold of the rail. So."

The passenger climbed aboard of the sloop, while Nick allowed his boat to remain just where it was.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" asked the captain.

"Fur you. Don't ye want me to take ye back?"

"No. I do not."

"Nor come after ye?"

"No."

"What are ye goin' ter do? Swim ashore?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, good-night, boss. Be keerful of the pop-gun; it may go off sometime."

"It will be very apt to if you don't become scarce around here pretty soon."

Nick laughed lightly and pushed his boat away from the sloop. Then he picked up his oars and rowed away in the darkness.

"I wonder what he would say if he knew that it was Nick Carter who rowed him down the river to-night?" thought the young detective.

Not very far away from where the sloop was anchored was another craft of less pretentious build, although considerably larger.

It was a schooner, and Nick pointed his boat's prow directly at it.

The outlines were just visible, for the night was growing steadily darker.

Huge clouds were rolling up from the eastward, and the detective noticed with satisfaction that ere another half-hour the night would be literally black.

He reached the schooner, passed it, and then ceased rowing, allowing his boat to drift slowly back until he was thoroughly concealed behind the black hull.

Then an entire half hour he sat there and waited.

Darker and darker grew the night.

The darkness became so intense that he could not see his hand before his eyes, and great drops of rain began to spatter upon him.

"A perfect night for this sort of work," he mused, as he pushed his boat free from the schooner's side, "and unless I am greatly mistaken, I can make fast to that sloop without being seen or heard. I'm going to try, anyhow."

The tide was still running very strong, and it was hardly necessary for him to do more than steer in order to reach the desired spot.

Not a thing could be seen. It seemed as though the whole world had suddenly gone out of existence, having naught but blackness behind.

Presently he drew in his oar and went to the bow.

He was not a moment too soon.

Knowing instinctively, rather than seeing, that he was about to collide with the hull of the sloop, he put out his right hand, and was thus enabled to prevent the shock and noise of a collision. Certain discovery would have followed, and his plans would have failed.

Thus far he had made not a sound.

Nick climbed aboard, and crept softly toward the companion-way, pausing every second step to listen, but hearing nothing.

He went over the entire deck, and finally descended to the cabin, moving with the same stealthy caution.

Nick had almost decided that he had been outwitted, and that the sloop was deserted, when suddenly, without any warning whatever, he received a violent blow on the head and sank senseless to the deck.

"Did you lay him out, John?" asked the cool tone of the man whom we know as captain.

"As stiff as a door, cap."

"Good. Close the hatch so that no light can get out, and we'll have a look at him."

"Better chuck him into the river now," said John, gruffly. "I hit him hard enough to break a dozen heads."

"No. Do as I say. Time enough to throw him overboard when we know he's dead."

The hatch-way was closed and a light procured.

The captain bent over the senseless form of Nick Carter and closely examined his face.

"Boys," he said, presently, "this fellow is made up. He is a fly cop, as I more than half suspected, and he must die."

CHAPTER VI.

TONY, THE STRANGLER.

An ominous silence followed the captain's discovery, which was presently broken by the voice of John, who growled:

"Shall I stick him now?"

"No—no; wait. Haste never does any good. Besides, I want to question him before he takes his bath."

Some brandy was poured into Nick's mouth, and he presently opened his eyes, and looked around him.

He saw that five men were in the cabin with him, and realized instantly that he was in the hands of a gang who would not hesitate at murder, and by the expression of their faces he judged that they meant to mete out small mercy for him.

That he was right, the sequel proved.

The captain stood nearest him, and Nick noticed that his face was hard and cruel.

He also noticed another thing with a great amount of satisfaction.

The men were so confident of the strength of superior numbers, and the meekness consequent upon the force of the blow that their victim had received, that they had not thought it worth their while to bind him.

It did not occur to them that one man could get away from five, particularly when they surrounded him in a little cabin like that of the sloop.

"Who are you?" asked the captain, coldly.

"Jest what I was wonderin'," replied Nick. "I feel sorter dazed with the hit on my head."

"Answer me!"

The voice was cold and stern, and the demand was emphasized by the exhibition of a glittering knife held menacingly before the detective's eyes.

"I'm a river broker," said Nick, coolly.

"Let me remind you that we are not now on the open river, young man, and that this thing makes no noise. You were plucky enough when you knew that I would not shoot, but I promise you that I will cut if you trifle with us now. Answer me; who are you?"

"I'm Flood-tide-Billy. Ever heard of me?"

"That's too thin, my friend. We all know Billy."

"Do, eh? All right. Then what did ye ask me fur?"

"Your name?"

"Well, ye got it, didn't ye?"

"Not the right one."

"Mebby you know more about it than I do."

"Why did you return to this sloop?"

"Why do I go to any sloop, or schooner, or any other craft? say!"

"Come—come! you can't play that game on us. We're 'onto' you, my man. River pirates don't go around with wigs and false mustaches."

"Don't eh?"

"You're a fly cop."

"Am, eh?"

"And we want to know your lay."

"Do, eh?"

"Yes, we do, eh! We're not out here to-night for pleasure."

"Neither was I."

"For what, then?"

"Profit."

Nick had been gaining both time and strength during the short conference, as well as studying the faces and comparative strength of the men around him.

He had made up his mind to make a bold dash for liberty, relying upon his wonderful strength and agility to accomplish it.

He was still flat upon the deck, but to him that fact made little difference, for his muscles were so active that he could leap to his feet from such a position as quickly as from a chair.

The captain quietly took out his watch.

"I will give you one minute in which to decide whether you will make a clean breast of the whole thing, or die," he said. "Draw your knives, boys, and when I drop this handkerchief, you may make short work of the cop."

Five knives glittered in as many hands upon the instant.

"Fifteen seconds," said the captain.

Nick's eyes roamed from face to face, seeking that which belonged to the man whom he wanted to attack first.

"Thirty seconds."

Still Nick remained quiet, while the ruffians seemed to grow eager for the instant to arrive when they could fall upon him and hack him to pieces.

"Forty-five seconds."

Nothing could be heard but the ticking of the watch which the captain held in his hand.

"Fifty seconds."

Then Nick acted.

Like a flash of lightning he was upon his feet.

His fist shot out like a cannon-ball, and John, who was a little in advance of the others, fell back like a stricken bullock.

With cries resembling the roar of wild beasts, the others then threw themselves forward with uplifted knives and murderous hearts.

But again Nick was too much for them.

His foot flew up and knocked the knife from the foremost man's hand. His fist followed, and the fellow was hurled backward against his companion, utterly confusing them for an instant.

Nick quickly followed up the advantage thus gained.

He bounded forward and seized in an iron grasp the man whom he had just struck,

Then, raising him from the floor as though he were a babe, the detective hurled him bodily, straight at the now advancing men.

The human missile flew true to its aim, and three of the ruffians went down as though laid low by the sweep of a scythe.

The fourth was the captain.

He leaped toward Nick, doubly infuriated by the fact that he was now thoroughly satisfied that it was none other than Nick Carter, the little giant, who was before him.

But Nick met him half way.

With a lightning-like movement he seized the hand which held the knife.

Then, exerting all of his great strength, he bent the captain's wrist quickly backward.

There was a snap like the breaking of a pipe-stem, and a yell of pain from the captain.

Nick's left arm shot out and his fist landed with terrific force squarely on the fellow's nose.

Now was the detective's time, if ever.

He turned, and with one bound reached the hatchway. It was closed and fastened, but again his strength proved too great for ordinary opposition.

In an instant he tore the hatch open and leaped out into the darkness, followed by the report of two revolvers and the ringing of a couple of bullets in his ears.

But he was unhurt.

The night was as black as Erebus as he bounded forward and crouched behind a small boat that was overturned upon the sloop's deck.

The men rushed upon the deck in their eager haste to capture him.

One of them had been thoughtful enough to seize a bull's-eye lantern which was already lighted, and with it he searched the water around the sloop as far as the rays would reach.

Of course he could see nothing of Nick.

"Let's search the deck," said one of them. "Mebby he didn't go overboard."

"Bah! dy'e think he'd stay here? Not much!"

"He's a terror, ain't he?"

"Lightnin's nothin' to that feller."

"Who is he?"

"Look here, Tony, there's only one man in New York who could do what he did, an' that's the young devil they call Nick Carter."

"Ah! the 'little giant.'"

"That's him, an' he's got to be done up."

The man called Tony chuckled audibly.

"A job for me, eh, Morgan?" he said; and Nick was conscious of a shiver when he heard the exultation in the man's voice.

"Yes—you an' yer string."

"I am never without it, Morgan. The time I spent in India wasn't lost, and there is nothing like the string for making a corpse. Do you remember Red Mike?"

"B-i-r-r-r!" said Morgan. "You give me the horrors, Tony. I kin stand knifin' a man, or puttin' a chunk o' cold lead into him, but when it comes to windin' that cord o' yourn 'round a feller's throat, and a-makin' his tongue an' his eyeballs stick out like fingers, I ain't in it."

A low laugh was Tony's reply, and then the men began a search of the deck.

But they had no idea that Nick remained aboard of the sloop, and not expecting to find their man, the search was only a half-hearted one, so that the detective had no difficulty in keeping out of their way by dodging around the boat.

The light thrown by a bull's-eye lantern reaches only the point at which it is directed, and renders the surrounding darkness much greater by contrast.

This fact was a great advantage to Nick, and he did not fail to make the most of it.

When he had first heard the word string mentioned in connection with killing he had become greatly interested in the conversation, and from the subsequent remarks made by the men it became evident that Tony was a strangler.

His reference to India as the place where he had learned the art of using his peculiar yet terrible weapon was full of meaning.

Everybody knows of that strange, wild sect. They are as stealthy as a cat, as determined as Fate, and as deadly as a cobra.

Eugenie La Verde was strangled to death. Could it be possible that there was any connection between her murder and this gang of men who made a sloop in New York Bay their place of rendezvous?

Had Nick stumbled upon a clew to the crime in Forty-seventh street, where he least expected it?

At all events he resolved to have a good look at the man Tony, and to learn more concerning the purposes of these five men.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGLER'S THREAT.

After satisfying themselves that the detective had made good his escape, the three men, Tony, Morgan and their companion, who was known among them as Crofty, returned to the cabin of the sloop.

Nick followed them closely, and reached the hatchway in time to hear all that was said.

"Well?" demanded the captain when the three men returned from the deck.

"Skipped," replied Morgan, laconically.

"How?"

"Flew away, I guess. There was not a sign of him."

"See!" and the captain held up his right arm, the wrist of which Nick had broken in the struggle. "My wrist is

broken. He must pay for it. Do you know who it was, Tony?"

"Morgan told me."

"What did he say?"

"The little giant."

"Right. He could have been none other. I have heard of him often, but have never seen him before. Tony, he must die."

"At my hands?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once. The sooner, the better."

"To-morrow, then."

"Bah! If you get him foul within a week, I will give you a thousand dollars."

"Done, cap. He's a dead man. My string never failed me yet. More than one has gone down beneath it, and oh, how I love to see them gasp for breath."

"How is the wind?" asked the captain, curtly.

"None at all," replied Morgan. "The rain has knocked it all out. We could not reach the nest to-night if we tried."

"Then let us go ashore. Sindahr will be there. Come."

Nick waited to hear no more, but went hastily to his boat and untied the painter.

As he drifted away, he heard the low murmur of voices as the men came upon deck from the cabin of the sloop.

Soon there came a gentle splash in the water, and he knew that they had put the boat over the side—the very one behind which he had hidden, when they were searching for him so eagerly.

That they had some rendezvous on shore near that point, Nick felt certain, and he resolved to follow them at all risks.

Standing in the stern of his own boat with a single oar, he could force her through the water as silently as a shadow, while he conjectured that they would row, and that he could thus follow the sound of their oars in the water.

He was right.

They were soon in the boat and rowing rapidly away, while Nick followed them, sculling as fast as they rowed. A long pier stretched far out into the bay, near by, and they made directly for it.

The noise made by their oars in the water ceased, and Nick paused, knowing that they had gone beneath the pier.

Presently he sculled cautiously forward.

His boat touched the pier, and drawing in his oar, he used his hands upon the planking, to force his boat ahead.

When far beneath the pier, he stopped and listened again.

The silence of death and the blackness of the Styx reigned supreme.

Cautiously Nick drew his little dark-lantern from his pocket, pressed the spring and opened the slide.

A ray of light shot out over the water.

The empty boat employed by the men in coming from the sloop was immediately before him, but the men had disappeared.

The boat was fastened to a cross-beam of the pier, just where a crib was sunk into the water.

It was not likely that they had jumped into the river, and therefore it followed that there must be a way of passing through the crib, or of reaching the dock from that point.

Nick pulled his boat forward.

He searched the crib and was examining it intently, when something, he knew not what, caused him to turn his head suddenly.

The act saved his life.

There was a flash and a loud report, and a bullet whizzed past his ear.

Like a shot he turned and leaped toward the point from whence the flash had proceeded, for in that one instant he had seen the dark form of a man.

He reached him and seized him in his iron grasp, but even as he did so, the man who had fired the shot was endeavoring to escape.

They grappled just as he was balanced on the gunwale of the boat, and the next instant they were in the river and floating away with the tide.

The struggle was short, for one man was no match for Nick.

As soon as they came to the surface, Nick twisted himself free from his opponent's grasp, and struck him a violent blow in the face with his fist.

He would not have been rendered senseless more quickly if struck with a hammer, and Nick quietly swam to the nearest wharf with his prisoner.

Having reached it, he pulled the fellow upon the planks, and then with all the expertness of a pickpocket, searched him.

He found nothing of interest to him, and so left the man upon the dock, to revive as best he could, or to stay there senseless until found. Nick, who was an extremely expert swimmer, again plunged boldly into the water.

He headed straight for the pier where he had left his boat, and reached it without accident. Then he set out at once for the pier where the boat had been procured, realizing that the men were too much on their guard for him to learn more that night.

Once landed, he hurried to the ferry, crossed to New York, and took the elevated road.

His destination was the house in Forty-seventh street.

"It is my belief that these men know something about the death of Eugenie La Verde," he thought, "and that Tony knows more of the particulars than the others."

"For the sake of the argument, I will premise that Tony went to the house on the night of the murder, and that he strangled the girl with his cord.

"What was the motive for the crime, if he committed it?

"What did these men expect to gain by murdering a *danseuse*? Not money or jewels, certainly, for they left both, to a considerable amount, on the bureau.

"How did they enter the house from the street, and how leave it?

"In what way is this captain, who is evidently an American, to be benefited by Eugenie's death?

"Those fellows are on their guard, now. They know that I am after them and they will be more than ordinarily cautious, unless Tony succeeds in getting his deadly string around my neck!"

He was soon again in the house in Forty-seventh street, where the beautiful Eugenie La Verde had met her sudden and mysterious fate.

When he entered, he went straight to Eugenie's room.

As he stood upon the threshold, he thought he heard a rustling noise not unlike that made by the dress of a woman as she passed across a floor.

He paused suddenly and listened.

The noise came again.

Quickly he brought forth his little lantern, and touched the button, throwing a gleam of light into the apartment.

From point to point he turned the ray of light, himself remaining standing in the door-way.

The room was empty.

A moment's search satisfied him on that point, but he was equally sure that he had heard something.

What?

Had a person been there when he stepped over the threshold? and if so, by what means had that person left the room?

The noises that he had heard could not have been made by a rat, or a mouse.

If the room had been tenanted by a human being who wished to escape observation, why had that person not gone while he was yet in the lower hall, instead of waiting until he stood upon the very threshold of the room?

Perhaps the occupant of the apartment was sleeping when he entered, and did not rouse until the last moment.

Wonderingly, Nick approached the bed, for he had a peculiar feeling that it was not a human being that had been in the room when he entered, and yet his reason told him that it was.

Suddenly, having lighted the gas and turned toward the bed, he started.

Before him was the proof that somebody or something had been there since he had left the place.

He remembered perfectly how the pillows had been placed when he was there before, and now they were dif-

ferently located. One of them was near the foot of the bed and the other was on the floor.

Both were crushed, as though they had been used.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIGHT WITH A "SHADOW."

Nick did not know, until some time afterward, how near he had been to death at the moment when he crossed the threshold of Eugenie La Verde's room that night.

Nevertheless strange thoughts suggested themselves to his mind as he prosecuted his search through the place, and examined the pillows.

He was conscious, too, of a peculiar odor that he did not recognize, and which made his nerves tingle with an odd sensation that he could not explain.

The pillow on the floor looked as though somebody had pounded it out of all shape, as one will do at times in order to lie more comfortably. But the bed gave no signs of recent occupancy.

Had a man or a woman been there and lain upon the bed, some marked evidence of the fact would have been left. However, there was none.

It had been Nick's intention to take a hasty survey of the house and then go home and rest until the following day.

Now, however, he hesitated.

Presently he went slowly down the stairs, opened and closed the front door, and instead of going out, returned silently to the foot of the stairs and stood, listening.

For an hour he remained perfectly motionless, but not a sound came to him to reveal the presence of anyone, and at last, satisfied that he would gain nothing by waiting longer that night, he noiselessly left the house and started homeward.

As Nick drew near to his own residence, a slight motion made by a dark shadow on the opposite side of the street attracted his attention.

"Somebody watching for me," was his mental comment.

"I wonder if it is Tony, with his string? If so, he has made good time, and his presence here so quickly may account for the noise I heard in the house in Forty-seventh street. In case it is the strangler, I'll give him a little sport before dawn."

He went directly up the steps of his own house and entered.

People knew well enough the house where Nick lived, but nobody knew that he also owned the house directly back of it, fronting upon the other street.

He had purchased it some time before, and had so arranged that he could enter or leave his own house by the other one without fear of being seen or shadowed.

Just now, however, his purpose was to let Tony know that he was Nick Carter.

Hastening to his room, he hurriedly removed his wet clothes, placed a few necessary things in his pockets, and again went out.

Turning down the street, he soon became convinced that Tony was following him, and then he set out in earnest.

Hurrying over to Third avenue, he ran up the steps and caught a down train, just as it was moving out of the station.

The purpose in that was to compel Tony to run also, for Nick's real idea in "having some fun" with the strangler was only to get a good view of his face.

True, he had seen him in the cabin of the sloop, at the time of the row. But he had also seen them all, and he had no idea which one was Tony.

Nick saw his "shadow" running, and watched him as, disregarding the rules of the road, he leaped upon the platform of the train after it was in motion, in spite of the efforts of the guard to thrust him back.

The detective walked back through the cars until he came to the one in which Tony was quietly seated.

There was a seat directly opposite the strangler, and Nick took it, while, without any effort to conceal his purpose, he carefully studied the man's face.

When the train reached Houston street, Nick rose and left the car.

Tony did likewise.

Nick passed down the stairs and boarded an up town surface car.

Tony did the same.

"Cheeky!" muttered Nick. "I wonder if he thinks I'm a fool? Well, I'm tired of this, and I'll shake him and go home."

He remained on the car until he reached Fourteenth street, when he got down and went westward as far as the Morton House.

He turned the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth street about two hundred feet in advance of Tony.

The distance was not much, but it was enough.

As soon as he turned, Nick began making a rapid change.

He had not gone twenty feet before his appearance was entirely altered.

From a young man he was changed to a very old one. A light mustache had given place to a set of snow-white whiskers patterned a la Greeley. The derby hat that he had worn had disappeared—for it was of the "crush" kind—and in its place was a broad brimmed felt. The jaunty cane that he had carried was taken apart and thrust into a pocket. A pair of spectacles adorned his nose, and he walked with the hesitation of one who has long suffered the tortures of rheumatism.

The entire change had not occupied more than one minute of actual time, and as soon as it was completed Nick wheeled abruptly and retraced his steps.

He turned the corner and went on toward Third avenue.

He met Tony and passed him, smiling when he saw that the strangler had quickened his steps.

He could have touched the fellow as he passed, and he felt a strong inclination to do so with no very gentle hand.

However, he did not, and in another moment Tony had turned the corner and disappeared.

"I guess I am done with him for to-night," thought Nick, "and now I'll go home and go to bed."

He reached Third avenue, boarded a car, rode to his corner and got down.

Then he paused, while an amused smile stole over his features.

Tony was standing on the corner as though awaiting his arrival.

"That fellow is smarter than I thought," muttered Nick. "Has he penetrated my disguise, or is he only waiting here in the hope that I will show up in the old shape?"

Again he passed Tony, but the fellow did not look at him.

Walking on down the street, he presently took a small mirror from his pocket and held it up before him.

The glass reflected the form of Tony skulking along rapidly behind, and gaining with every step.

"The scoundrel is going to try his game on to-night," muttered Nick. "I hope he may succeed if I don't give him a dose that he'll remember many a day."

Tony drew nearer and nearer.

Nick still held the mirror so that he could see the skulking, snake-like figure of the would-be murderer.

He could see something of eagerness in the man's gait, as though he thirsted for blood, and could ill-restrain his passion for murder when the moment drew near for its accomplishment.

Nearer and yet nearer.

They had reached a place along the block where the darkness was greater than in the portion that they had already traversed.

Suddenly Tony darted forward, moving like a cat.

At the same instant Nick turned.

He stooped and jumped aside in the selfsame second. Just in time.

There was an angry swish through the air, made by the cord of the strangler as he attempted to wind it around Nick's throat.

With a quick bound Nick was at Tony's side.

He seized him and was about to hurl him to the pavement when the fellow seemed to slip from his grasp like an eel.

Again the swish of the cord, and again Nick dodged just in time to avoid the strange but deadly weapon.

The detective knew that, strong as he was, if the cord once touched his neck, nothing could save him.

Once more he leaped toward Tony. Again he seized him, and this time the fellow did not slip away as before.

He could not play the same trick twice upon Nick Carter.

But even as the detective seized the man, he heard a loud hiss, and a noxious odor filled the air.

It was the suffocating smell of the cobra. Like a flash Nick realized that the man was a snake-charmer and that his pets would protect him.

He loosened his hold and leaped back out of danger,

Then his fist shot out, striking the strangler squarely between the eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

A SCOUNDREL'S SCHEME.

It is needless to say that Tony, the strangler, went down beneath the fist of Nick Carter as though he had been shot.

Neither did he attempt to rise, for the force of the blow had rendered him as senseless as a dead man.

Nick drew nearer and regarded him earnestly, but an angry hiss warned him not to go too close, and at the same instant, two bead-like eyes, glowing like sparks of fire, swayed to and fro above the strangler's heart.

The deadly cobra was there, and with a serpent's wisdom, it knew that its master had been hurt.

With a shudder Nick turned away, knowing that Tony would presently revive, and that the snake would not leave him.

Fearing, however, that some person might come along who would attempt to rouse the senseless form of Tony and so get bitten by the cobra, he stepped into a door-way near at hand and waited.

No one came, fortunately, and presently Tony began to show signs of returning consciousness.

After a little he sat up and rubbed his head in a dazed sort of way, as though he wondered where he was and how he got there.

Recollection returned very suddenly when it did come, for he leaped quickly to his feet and started away at a rapid pace.

Nick followed, changing his disguise again as he went. The opportunity was too good a one to be lost.

Evidently Tony had no use for cars, for he continued to walk until he had covered the whole distance from Forty-seventh street to East Houston.

Down that he went to Georck street, where he suddenly darted into the hall-way of a high and dirty tenement house of the very worst description.

Nick was not far behind him.

The strangler mounted to the topmost floor of the house and Nick kept close behind, moving silently as a shadow.

He reached the door through which Tony had passed, almost as soon as it was closed, and his ear was instantly at the keyhole.

"Well!" he heard the gruff voice of John demand, "did you do it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Let that be your answer!" and Tony pointed to the confusion between his eyes.

John laughed audibly.

"Ye found one feller that yer string didn't fit, didn't ye?" he jeered.

"It will fit you," was the meaning reply, and it evidently had its effect upon John, for he jeered no more.

"I went out to strangle the detective to-night," continued Tony, "because the captain wished him out of the way. Now I will pursue him until he is dead, because he struck me—because he defeated me."

"Mebby he'll be so fly that ye can't git the string onto him at all."

"Then there is another way, even surer."

"How?"

"Look!"

A loud hiss told Nick that Tony had taken the cobra from his breast.

"Ugh!" grunted John. "I hate that thing! What d'ye bring it here for anyway?"

"The cobra is always with me. We are never apart."

"Ugh! whew! Say Tony, I've had snakes afore now, but I'm blamed if I'd want 'em always. I don't like 'em."

"They were not of this kind."

"No, most of mine were green, an' some of 'em had seven heads. Say, put that thing away, or I'll have 'em again; it makes me shake all over."

"You're a fool, John!"

"Why? 'Cos I don't like snakes? Mebby so, but that's a matter of opinion. Now that that pretty little pet o' yours is outer sight, tell me how you'd use it to 'do up' the fly cop if the string didn't work."

"I would not use this one, but others like it."

"Ye've got more, hey?"

"I have many. What would be easier than to turn them loose in the detective's house?"

"By thunder! that's a great idea!"

"A bite from the cobra means certain death."

"But, I say!"

"Well?"

"Others would be bitten too, wouldn't they? The whole family, hey?"

"What matter?"

"Oh, nothin'; jest curious, that's all."

"So that the detective dies, I do not care how many go with him. And he shall die!"

"Shake, Tony."

The two men sealed the compact of death by clasp hands.

"When are ye goin' ter do it?" continued John.

"I shall try the string once more. If it fails me again, then the snakes."

"Can ye git in the house?"

"Have you ever seen a house that I could not enter?"

"No."

"I have but to open the front door, remove the cover from my basket and toss the whole thing inside. The jar and the sudden awakening will make the cobras angry. They will crawl out and scatter over the house. If they find a bed, they will enter it. If a person is there, so much the better, for it will be warmer. When the person moves, against whom they are coiled, the cobra will be angry again, for they have bad tempers. The person may turn over in his sleep and so roll upon the cobra; if so, he will be bitten. He may waken and attempt to leave the bed; if so, the cobra will do its work before he can get out of reach. He may wake suddenly and find a swaying head, a darting tongue, and two bright eyes within a foot of his face. He will scream with horror and attempt to escape. The scream and the attempt will be fatal. His only chance of safety would be in keeping perfectly still and closing his eyes, but what man would have strength enough to do it? Would you?"

"No, I'm cussed if I would."

"Next time you have the 'snakes,' try it, John."

"I have, Tony, and then, instead of one, I would have four thousand. But say."

"What!"

"There won't be anything left alive in the house but snakes, when morning comes."

"No—nothing."

"B-i-r-r! I think I'd rather be hung."

"You will probably have your wish, unless you get familiar with my cobras."

"Which I'll take care not to do. No offense, Tony, but it strikes me that you're a snakey lot. Even the girl Eug—"

"Stop! How many times must I tell you never to mention that name to me?"

Tony's voice was intense with anger. He paused a second and then continued:

"John, I swear if you speak that name again, in my presence, or allude to the manner of her death, I will set my cobra upon you by throwing him in your face. Remember, for I mean what I say."

"I'm sorry, Tony. I forgot."

"See that you do not forget again. You may rest assured that Sindahr will not. Bah! pass that bottle unless you want it all."

There were a few moments of silence, and then John's voice asked:

"When are you going to the 'nest'?"

"Time enough for that when the detective, Nick Carter, is dead."

"Sure!"

"We can do nothing with that fellow constantly about our heels."

"He's a baby terror, he is."

"Ay, he has the strength of three men."

"Of three? A dozen would be nearer the mark. He's quicker'n a flash, an' ain't afraid o' nothin'."

"He is doomed."

"Well, I'd rather be John Crispy than Nick Carter jest now. Where'd you meet him to-night?"

"At his house. He went in and came out again."

"Spouse he hadn't come out again?"

"I should have gone in."

"And strangled him in bed, eh?"

"Precisely."

"That's yer favorite way, ain't it?"

"I like it best."

"When are ye goin' to try the trick on again, Tony?"

"The first time that I think he has gone to sleep in his own bed. Let him do that once, after to-night, and he will never waken. I will strangle him so quickly and so silently that a person in the same bed will not know what has happened until in his struggles he awakens somebody."

There were short snatches of conversation after that, but in a few moments the two scoundrels threw themselves upon their beds and went soundly to sleep.

Then Nick turned away, well satisfied to go home.

But his heart was filled with dread for his Ethel.

Of himself he did not think, but the recollection of Tony's threat, and the vivid description he had given of the consequences to be expected from the presence of cobras in the house, made Nick realize more than ever before, something of the danger to which he was constantly exposing himself.

"Ah, well; forewarned is forearmed," he murmured, "and I do not believe that Fate meant me or my beloved wife for a victim of Tony, the strangler. Tony will be after me early to-morrow, and I must be ready for him."

And he was.

CHAPTER X.

SOLVING PROBLEMS.

On the following day Nick went again to the house in Forty-seventh street in order to continue his researches, for he realized that a very necessary part of the evidence he had to furnish in the case, was an explanation of the murderer's method of entering and leaving the house.

He found everything just as he had left it on the previous night.

Whoever had been in the room when he crossed the threshold, had evidently deemed it unwise to return.

The detective went at once to the cellar, and began an exhaustive search for the secret passage-way, but after an hour vainly spent, he again sought the stair-way which had puzzled him.

The greater discoveries are made by accident, and so it happened in this case.

He had arranged a box on which to stand while examining the underside of the stairs, but in putting it in place, he had not fixed it securely, and accordingly, just as he was becoming interested in his task, the box toppled from its place.

Nick lost his balance and would have fallen had he not thrown up his hands to save himself: as he did so, he grasped a two-by-four inch timber which looked as though it had been placed there for additional support to the stairs.

The timber was not stationary, however. It came loose in his hand, but with sufficient difficulty to save him from falling.

Leaping down, he rearranged the box and again mounted it.

The necessity for searching was, however, ended.

The removal of the stick of wood disclosed an ordinary

staple and hook which fastened the movable stairs in place.

He removed the hook, and the stairs worked just as he had expected them to.

A person could go from the cellar to the parlor-floor without having to pass through a door.

The discovery was one which filled Nick with pleasure, and there only remained now to find an equally easy way into the street.

But hour after hour passed, and found him still searching.

At last he turned away, noticing, as he did so, that one of the stays which supported the floor above, was out of place.

It did not occur to him that he could straighten it, and yet he put out his hand and gave it a sharp pull.

What was his surprise to find that it was loose at the top.

As he pulled there was resistance enough to satisfy him that the support acted as a lever, while behind him he heard a slight grating noise as of something moving on small iron wheels.

Turning, he flashed his light along the wall, but saw nothing.

Nevertheless he pulled the lever away over, and then placed a weight upon it to hold it down while he searched for the aperture of which he felt certain it was the instrument.

"Ah!"

He paused with the glad exclamation on his lips.

Before him, close to the wall, was an opening in the cellar-floor.

One of the stones, with which the floor was paved, had settled down nearly five feet, leaving an opening quite large enough to admit him, and when he flashed his light along, the underground gallery that he saw, he discovered that it led toward the street, and was, without doubt, the secret entrance for which he had been searching.

Nick took the precaution to put more weight upon the lever before descending into the forbidding opening that it had revealed.

Then with his dark-lantern in hand, he entered.

The passage way was not high enough for him to stand upright, and was only sufficiently wide to accommodate his body.

It led him about twenty feet, diagonally in the direction of the street, and then abruptly ended.

He looked up.

Over his head were the stone steps which led to the front door of the house.

"More stairway doors," he muttered. "This will not be so well concealed."

Nor was it.

There was an ordinary bolt such as are used for fastening doors, which he easily moved, noticing, as he did so, that the bolt was so arranged that it could be worked from the outside.

That is, a portion of the next toe piece had been chipped off, leaving a space through which a small steel rod could be thrust, to move the fastening.

First, he tried to push the stone up, but in vain.

Then he endeavored to pull it down toward him, but it refused to move.

There was but one way left and that was to slide it away lengthwise.

The effort met with instant success.

The stone slid along easily, offering little or no resistance, and thus afforded an opening sufficiently large for an ordinary-sized man to squeeze through.

A means by which a murderer could have entered and left the house when Eugenie La Verde was choked to death was now found.

That portion of the case was no longer a mystery.

It was still daylight in the street, and Nick hastily closed the aperture, having studied out how he could open it from the outside if necessary.

He returned to the cellar and removed the weights that he had placed upon the lever.

It remained down, as, indeed, he had expected it would. Then once more to the secret passage-way.

There, he raised the stone and put it in place.

On the underside was a handle.

He grasped that, pulled upon it, and the stone came down in his grasp.

The secret was now entirely his.

He could go either way through the hidden passage without any trouble.

The mystery was a mystery no longer.

"I have only to satisfy myself, now, that Tony is the murderer, and then the whole story is in my possession. But I must find a motive," he thought. "Why did those men want Eugenie La Verde out of the way? There is another mystery still, to solve."

The flat stone which covered the opening in the cellar-floor, was worked by the lever, by means of a long steel rod and two cog-wheels.

It was a clever mechanical device, and whoever planned it must have had a strong incentive.

"There is nothing more to do here now," he thought. "I will go home."

He had been at home about an hour when he rose and went to the window, whistling softly to himself, and lost in thought.

Suddenly he started.

Darkness was just settling over the city, and half concealed in the door way of a vacant house opposite was Tony, the strangler.

"I had forgotten all about him," mused Nick. "It won't do to let that fellow run at large. I think I will arrest him, cobra and all, and take him down to headquarters. If he gets a chance, he'll fill the house with snakes, and I don't want that, particularly in my absence."

Nick remained at the window several moments, lost in thought.

Suddenly he smiled. A good idea had occurred to him.

He went to the telephone and called up Inspector Byrnes.

"I am going to bring you a man whom I want you to hold for me till called for," he said, as soon as they were in communication.

"All right," replied the officer. "What do you know about him?"

"I know he is a murderer although perhaps not the murderer."

"He will do to keep, anyhow."

"Rather. Say!"

"Hello."

"This fellow is a snake-charmer, and in order to take him in, I have got to kill a cobra which he carries around with him. Will you have two men on the corner of Mott and Bleecker for me, in an hour?"

"Yes. How will they know you?"

"Easily. They will see me knock my man down first. Then they will see a cobra stick its head out of the fellow's coat after which, if they look sharp, they will see me shoot the cobra."

"Good; but don't kill the man instead of the cobra."

"I guess not."

"How are you going to get him there?"

"He's outside now, waiting for me."

"Waiting for you to take him in?"

"Yes. He's in the shadow business. He's made a contract to strangle me to death with a cord, and is on my trail now."

"Ah! Well, fetch him in; I'd like to have a look at him."

"All right. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Nick hung up the ear-piece and hastily made a few changes in his appearance.

Then he started out to lead Tony to the Central Office of the police, where he proposed to keep him out of mischief by locking him up in a cell.

"Now, my gentle Tony, come along," murmured Nick, as he ran down the steps. "I can't keep on with this case and feel easy about matters at home unless I put you where you will be out of mischief, and since you are kind enough to follow me, I'll show you the way."

In order to make it perfectly easy for the strangler to keep track of him, Nick avoided the elevated road, and took a surface car.

Bleecker street and the Bowery were duly reached by Nick with Tony a close second.

There the detective dismounted from the car and walked

leisurely westward, purposely going slowly so that the strangler could gain upon him without the appearance of haste.

Tony came near. There were many people on Bleeker street at that hour, and in order to be sure of not losing sight of his prey, the strangler was obliged to keep quite close.

When the corner of Mott street was reached, they were not more than ten feet apart.

Nick kept steadily on until he reached the curbstone.

Then he turned suddenly and in an instant was face to face with the man who was seeking an opportunity to strangle him.

Tony was evidently startled and puzzled by the maneuver, but Nick did not leave him long in doubt.

The detective's fist shot out, propelled by all the force of which he was master.

There was no withholding such a blow.

Tony fell as though he had been shot; his head struck the pavement first, and he was instantly deprived of consciousness.

Ere a single moment had passed the thing happened which Nick had expected.

The hooded and hideous head of the cobra was raised menacingly over the senseless man's breast, where it swayed to and fro like the pendulum of a clock.

Several who had gathered around at the first sign of a disturbance, started back in horror when they saw the snake.

Nick waved them all back and then he drew his revolver. "Stop!" cried somebody in the crowd; "you will kill the man."

But Nick Carter knew his own skill too well to fear such a result. He stooped low down, so that the bullet, after penetrating the snake's head, could not hit Tony.

One quick glance satisfied him that there was no danger to others.

Suddenly there was a flash and a loud report.

The snake, pierced through the head, writhed and twisted until it was free from Tony's clothing.

The moment it was upon the pavement it was pounced upon by men and boys, who pounded it with clubs and paving stones until it would have been a hard matter to have recognized its original shape.

While the rabble were still annihilating the reptile, two men approached Nick and announced themselves at his service.

"Pick up that fellow and bring him along," said Nick, pointing to Tony.

The men hesitated.

They thought that perhaps there might be more snakes hidden away in his clothing.

A few words reassured them, and Tony was presently securely locked in a cell at Police Headquarters, while Nick was closeted with the inspector.

But he did not remain long, and only gave the chief a brief outline of all that he had accomplished.

"You are a wonderful fellow, Nick," said the chief admiringly, "and that was a remarkable shot with no light but the flaring torch of a peanut stand. What next?"

"I don't know. Good-night. Keep my man securely for me, for I shall want him again. I'll drop in to-morrow and talk with him, if I have time."

Nick left hurriedly, and was quickly on his way to Goerck street.

He felt confident that he would find John there, and he wanted to use him.

When near his destination, he stepped into a hall-way for a few moments, and when he emerged, it was in the character of a negro, whose face was as black as the night which surrounded him.

He was just in time, for the captain and Morgan soon came out of their Goerck street rendezvous and went off together toward Houston street.

Nick followed at a safe distance.

The two men boarded a green car which took them to the foot of West Forty-second street.

There they took the Weehawken ferry, and Nick did likewise.

He felt that he was on his way to the "nest" at last.

At Weehawken, the captain and Morgan went directly

to a little stable in a deserted quarter and presently were seated together in an open buggy behind a powerful horse.

How was Nick to follow them without being seen?

It was a hard question to answer, and he began to think that he would lose them after all, when he heard the captain tell Morgan to hold the horse while he went across the street for some cigars.

Morgan went to the horse's head, and the captain started away.

Now, if ever, was Nick's time.

He crept cautiously forward in the darkness until he reached the off-hind wheel of the buggy.

A man of less strength than Nick Carter's, could not have accomplished what he did then.

He seized the nut which held the wheel upon the axle, and without the aid of a wrench he unscrewed it and put it in his pocket.

Then, as silently as a shadow, he shrank back again out of sight.

The next moment the captain reappeared, and he and Morgan leaped into the buggy together.

They drove away rapidly, and Nick, running swiftly, followed them, knowing that they would not go far before the wheel would run off, and throw them into the road.

However, the wheel did better than might have been expected, for they drove nearly a mile before the accident occurred.

Nick was glad of an opportunity to rest, for the pace had been very rapid.

Fortunately for the men in the buggy, they had just slowed down a little to give their horse a chance to breathe, when the axle dropped.

Morgan fell into the road, and cursed loudly at the bruises he received, but the captain escaped uninjured, by leaping out on the other side.

Then they examined the wheel, and quickly found what was the matter.

"Well, we haven't much farther to go," said the captain.

After considerable maneuvering they managed to fasten the wheel so that by driving very slowly they kept it in place, while Nick was enabled to follow them without any difficulty whatever.

They traveled in that way for an hour or more, and then turned off from the main road into a lane. A quarter of a mile along the lane brought them to a commodious house which stood all alone at the edge of a wood, and looked as though it were uninhabited.

"The 'nest,'" thought Nick. "The next few hours ought to tell me a good deal, and they must."

The two men drove behind the house to an old barn where they cared for the horse, Nick never for a moment losing sight of them.

At last they entered the house, and as soon as it was safe to do so without unnecessary danger of immediate discovery, Nick followed.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO MURDERS IN ONE NIGHT.

Nick found himself in total darkness, but that was quickly dispelled by touching the button of his little bull's-eye lantern and throwing a brilliant stream of light across the room.

Before him was a door, and he passed through it into a wide hall-way.

He could not hear a sound until he reached the lower floor.

Then the low murmur of voices came to him.

He followed the direction of the sound until he came to a door which evidently opened into the room where the men were sitting.

The gruff voice of Morgan was easily recognized, and now and then the even tones of the captain penetrated the door.

There was another voice too, not loud enough to be distinguishable, but Nick decided that it belonged to Sindahr.

He could not catch a word of what they were saying, and he looked about him for a way to get nearer.

Farther down the hall was another door which led into the room adjoining the one where the men were talking, and he crept along the hall and passed through it.

At once the voices became plainer.

Flashing his light around Nick saw that he was in what had once been a dining-room, and also that there were cupboards against the partition which separated it from the room where the men were talking.

If it so happened that those cupboards opened through the partition, which was probable, it would be an easy matter for him to hear all that was being said.

Exerting all his caution, and moving as silently as a shadow, Nick carefully opened one of the cupboard doors.

The cupboards not only connected the two rooms, but the doors on the opposite side of the partition were made of glass and he could plainly see all that was taking place as well as hear every word that was uttered.

The group that he saw was a strange one.

There were the captain, Morgan, Sindahr, and an aged negress who was listening intently to all that was said.

They were all seated around a dining-table upon which were a bottle, some glasses, and a box of cigars.

"No," the captain was saying; "there is no danger of his coming here to-night. I wish there was. He will never escape me again, I swear."

"He's a devil!" ventured Morgan.

"Devil or not, if I ever have another opportunity such as I once had, he shall die. I will not wait to make terms with him."

"How do you know that he is onto this place?" asked Morgan.

"I do not know it, but I fear it. If he is, we will all be captured like so many rats in a trap."

"Sure!"

"At all events it is safer to leave."

"This is a hard place to get to."

"Yes, and it would be an easy matter to shadow any of us for the greater part of the distance. The house in Forty-seventh street is the safest place for us now."

Nick became more interested.

"Isn't that house watched?"

"Bah, no."

"I should think it would be."

"They gave up looking for the murderer long ago, and the house is as deserted as the grave."

Morgan chuckled.

"Fancy a detective smart enough to run that crime down," he said.

Then both men laughed.

"I think its funnier to fancy him getting his handcuffs on to the murderer."

The thought evidently struck them as very funny, for they laughed uproariously.

"I'd like to see him try it," said Morgan when his mirth had subsided, "particularly that fellow Nick Carter."

"Yes, I think we'd be well rid of him. His fists and his strength would not count for so much—I say, where do you suppose Tony was to-night?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Carter downed him and took him in."

"Cobra and all?"

"That would make it difficult. Still, that fellow can do anything."

"No, cap, there's one thing he can't do."

"What's that?"

"Capture the murderer of Eugenie La Verde."

"He may."

"Why, I thought you settled his hash."

"No, Tony didn't want me to, and I let him have his way."

"He's a queer fish."

"Rather. He takes food there every week!"

"The devil! Feeding the murderer of his own sister!"

"Exactly!"

"Say, cap!"

"What?"

"I think you'll have to count me out on living in that house."

"Nonsense!"

"I mean it. I've no relish for the place, since we would not be alone."

The captain laughed.

"You are afraid of Eugenie's slayer, eh?"

"Frankly, I am."

"Well, I don't know that I blame you, Morgan. Yet there is no danger."

To say that Nick was interested in the conversation that he had heard would be a feeble expression of his sensations.

He had learned many surprising things almost in one breath.

First, neither Tony, nor Morgan, nor Sindahr, was the murderer of Eugenie La Verde, although they all seemed to know who was.

Second, the murderer was in hiding in the very house where the crime had been committed.

Third, Tony was Eugenie La Verde's brother, and he was not only protecting the murderer of his sister, but carrying food to him from time to time.

Nick realized that he had not yet seen the real murderer, although he had once stood within a few feet of him in the dark, when he crossed the threshold of Eugenie La Verde's room and heard the rustle made by some one escaping from the place.

"If he is as dangerous as Morgan's fear of him would imply, why in the world didn't he try to choke me just as he did Eugenie?" muttered the detective.

The captain abruptly changed the subject.

He looked at his watch.

"Come," he said, "it is nearly midnight, and we must go."

The negress left the room to obey an order from the captain, and so left the three villains alone together.

"Morgan," said the captain, "you had better go first and Sindahr and I will follow with the other horse. Drive right on to the ferry boat and thence to the house in Forty-seventh street. Go slowly after you get to New York, so that Sindahr and I can get to the house first."

"Sindahr not going," said the Arabian, calmly.

"What!" cried the captain.

"Sindahr will not go there."

"You will have to, my friend."

"Sindahr never enter that house while he is alive."

"So you refuse to obey me?"

"Sindahr has spoken."

"Curse you! take that."

Like a flash the captain drew a revolver and discharged it almost in the Arabian's face.

The man sank back dead without a single groan.

"Shove him under the table; I was tired of him, anyhow," said the captain, coolly, replacing his revolver in his pocket, "and between you and me, Morgan, I am getting tired of Tony also."

"Let him kill the detective and then we can give him away. It will save the trouble of killing him," said Morgan.

"So that we get rid of him, I don't care how it's done."

"What shall we do with this body?"

"Let it lie there under the table and rot. We leave this house to-night, forever."

"Now, a word about other matters before Sal returns. Is everything ready for our scheme?"

"Everything."

"When do we spring it?"

"This is Wednesday. The time is fixed for Friday at midnight."

"And we get—"

"One hundred thousand."

"Good! One more question."

"Well?"

"Why need we share that with John and Tony?"

"Because John and Tony are alive."

"Exactly; but if they were dead?"

"I suppose it would be all ours."

"Would that please you, Phil?"

"I won't ask any questions if they don't show up for their share."

"Good! here comes Sal."

The next moment Sal entered the room.

Morgan presently, at a sign from the captain, rose, and left the house.

"Don't go until I come out," said the captain, and then he was alone with the negress.

"Well, Sal," he said, "we won't require your services any longer, and I'll pay you now."

"Yes, sah."

"How much do I owe you?"

"Twenty-fo' dollars, sah."

"No more? Why, that is cheap. Come here and get it."

The negress went around the table toward the captain unsuspectingly. Even Nick had no idea what was coming.

"Here is your pay!" exclaimed the villain, when Sal was close enough, and at the same instant he plunged a knife into her heart.

She uttered one loud gasp, and sank back lifeless.

Captain Philip had committed two deliberate murders in one night.

CHAPTER XII.

BRINGING THREADS TOGETHER.

It would have been an easy matter for Nick to have captured the two men then and there, but from his standpoint it was not good judgment to do so.

Eugenie La Verde's murderer was still unknown, and these men would be very valuable, at large, in helping him to solve the mystery.

They were going directly to the house in Forty-seventh street, and he could arrest them there at any time, when he had used them all he cared to.

As soon as the negress expired, the captain walked calmly from the room, leaving the corpses of his two victims there without an atom of remorse.

Nick followed, not by leaving the house the way he had entered it, but by going directly in the path of Captain Philip.

Morgan had the horse and buggy nearly ready, and his companion helped him to finish the task.

"Climb in," said the captain.

"What are you going to do with the other horse since we don't need him?"

"Leave him. He is worthless, anyway."

"But he will starve."

"Let him."

"At least set him loose."

"Bah! Chicken! Climb in, I tell you. I have no time for trifles."

Morgan obeyed, and Nick shuddered at the wanton cruelty of the two men.

Nevertheless they had unwittingly done him a service, for he was now provided with a means of returning to the city without walking.

He had no thought of following them, for he knew where to find them when he wanted them.

In the meantime he had something else to do.

After waiting long enough to give them a good start, he brought the other horse out of the stable.

There was an old harness in the barn, which he adjusted after some trouble.

In his pocket was the missing nut for the open buggy, and he was soon bowling along the road at a rapid pace.

He did not stop at Weehawken, but continued on to Hoboken.

There he gave the horse in charge of a liveryman with instructions to keep it until called for, and hurried to New York.

He went straight to the house of Inspector Byrnes.

"Inspector," he said, when the chief had admitted him, "there were two murders committed to-night by the men I have been pursuing. They are also the ones who know all about the killing of Eugenie La Verde! The bodies of their victims are now lying where they left them in a house not far from the Palisades."

"You're a marvel, Nick. Tell me where the house is and I'll wire the Jersey police."

Nick did so, but added:

"Don't make the case too hot till I say the word. Tell Chief Murphy, in Jersey, that you know who the murderer

is, and that you will hand him over before the week is out. In the meantime I don't want to scare my man."

"Good!"

"Two more things."

"Well?"

"Will you go with me in person to arrest the murderer of Eugenie La Verde?"

"I will; when?"

"To-morrow night. Come to my house at eight."

"I'll be there. Now the other thing."

"An order from you to let me see the prisoner I took to headquarters. I want to talk with him."

"Now?"

"Yes."

The order was quickly filled out, and Nick lost no time in reaching headquarters in Mulberry street.

He was shown at once to Tony's cell.

"Do you know me, Tony?" he asked.

"No. I don't know niggers."

"Don't, eh? Well, I know you, and I want to ask you some questions."

"Ask 'em."

"Why do you feed your sister's murderer?"

"To keep him alive."

"I should think you would rather kill him."

"Bah! Why? I would rather strangle the man who killed my pet cobra."

"You would, eh? What would you do if I brought you face to face with that man?"

"Anything you ask."

"Let me see you feed the murderer of your sister, Eugenie and I will do it."

"How do you know she was my sister?"

"Never mind. I do know it."

"He must be fed soon, or he will starve, or else leave the house."

"Will to-morrow night do?"

"Yes, but he will be cross."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"I? No. He dare not hurt me."

"Very well. To-morrow night I will take you there, and I promise you that you shall be brought face to face with the man who shot your cobra."

"With my hands free?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Does that matter, if I keep my word?"

"No."

"Good-by then till to-morrow night."

Promptly at eight o'clock on the following night Inspector Byrnes was at the house of Nick Carter.

In a few words Nick related the entire story of his adventures from first to last.

Then, while the chief waited, Nick hurried to headquarters and got Tony.

The strangler was kept securely handcuffed on the street, but Nick, who had again assumed the guise of the negro, assured him that he would be set free when once the house in Forty-seventh street was reached.

When the house was reached, Nick, much to Tony's astonishment, entered by the secret passage-way under the steps.

He had asked Tony what food he should provide for the murderer, and the strangler had assured him that he had some concealed in the house.

So they entered.

Leaving the others in the cellar, Nick went silently up stairs and found that the captain was there alone. He was sitting calmly in the back parlor, reading a paper, as unconcerned as though he owned the house.

Nick made a slight noise to attract his attention, and the captain looked up quickly.

Then, pistol in hand, he rose and went toward the hallway, where Nick was waiting in the dark for him.

As soon as the captain was in reach, Nick seized him.

He had no time to use his weapon, and in a twinkling he was thrown upon his back upon the floor, and handcuffed, and anklets were locked around his ankles.

"There, Captain Philip, that settles your hash, I think," said Nick, pleasantly.

The captain did not say a word. He did not even curse. He was calm, and evidently trying to think of a plan of escape.

When Nick returned to the cellar a surprise awaited him, for he found that Inspector Byrnes had captured Morgan in almost the same manner.

He had heard him coming through the secret passage-way, and had nabbed him before he knew what had happened.

The two men were securely fastened together in the back parlor.

"Now, Tony," said Nick, "we will feed the murderer. Come."

"Don't let him see you," said Tony.

"No. We will keep out of sight."

"Take off these bracelets."

Nick removed them and Tony led the way up stairs.

"Where is the food?" asked Nick.

"In the same room; hidden away."

"Ah! Well, go ahead."

Tony led the way to the door of Eugenie's room.

There, he paused and listened.

Presently he opened the door, passed in quickly and lighted the gas.

CHAPTER XIII.

EUGENIE'S MURDERER FINDS ANOTHER VICTIM.

Tony stood in the center of the room and clapped his hands loudly together.

Instantly a big picture which hung upon the wall trembled violently.

Suddenly the head of a serpent issued from behind the picture, and swayed back and forth.

Tony began to chant, and the serpent drew nearer, until Nick and the inspector saw a python over twelve feet in length swing itself to the bureau and thence to the floor.

They drew back, keeping well out of sight, while Nick held his trusty revolver in readiness.

Tony began to sway his head, chanting all the time, and keeping his place in the center of the room, while the python glided nearer and nearer.

Presently it reared its head until its glaring eyes were but a few inches from those of Tony.

Then it rested its head upon him and gliding on and on wound its hideous body round and round the strangler.

Then Tony turned and went toward another picture which he moved aside, revealing a grated aperture.

He opened that, thrust in his arm, and drew forth a rabbit which dropped upon the floor.

There it hopped around aimlessly for a moment, and then, discovering the open door, darted through it and disappeared.

Tony attempted to intercept it, but he had not taken a step before he uttered a cry of pain, and stopped.

The python, angered by the escape of the rabbit, was tightening its coils around the body of the strangler.

In vain Tony chanted. In vain he used every trick known to his profession. The snake would not be charmed.

Tighter and tighter grew the coils, while the python's head swayed malignantly before the face of its victim.

Suddenly Tony fell to the floor, and the serpent seemed to change its hold.

Its coils seemed to glide up and encircle the neck of the strangler.

Nick had meanwhile been watching for a chance to use his revolver.

The chance came when the python next raised its head. The bullet sped true to its aim, and the python's head was pierced by the lead.

Nick and the inspector leaped forward.

They seized and raised him up.

He was senseless, but not dead.

"He cannot live," said Nick. "Let us revive him if we can. His ribs are broken, and he is bleeding internally. It was terrible."

Tony at last opened his eyes.

The story he told was disjointed, but in substance it was as follows:

He belonged to a family of snake-charmers, of which he and his sister Eugenie were the most expert.

Long ago he and Eugenie had quarreled because of his dishonest ways. She would have no more to do with him.

At Captain Phil's request, he had persuaded her to take the house in Forty-seventh street, which had long been a resort for certain criminals, who had managed to keep it so unsuspected by the police.

The secret passages were old. He did not know who had made them or where they were constructed.

Eugenie had given all the serpents to Tony except the python, of which she was very fond.

Even her maid, Delia Dent, had been unaware of the python's presence, and knew nothing of Eugenie's passion for snakes.

Tony had come to the house on the night of his sister's death, accompanied by John and Sindahr, to demand money.

He had reached the door of his sister's room just as the python had glided from its hiding place in the wall behind the picture.

His presence had seemed to anger the reptile, which had wound itself around its mistress' neck and hissed loudly.

He saw that it was choking Eugenie, and rushed forward to save her.

Then the python would have attacked him, but, realizing it, he turned and fled, leaving her there to her fate.

He had told John and Sindahr all that he had seen, and had learned for the first time that Sindahr had been charmed by a serpent when a child, and could not go near one without falling under the peculiar magnetic spell which they exert. He had a horror of the house because of the presence of the python.

Later Tony had returned and fed the reptile. Why, he did not know, except that he loved serpents.

He told them where his cobras were concealed, and the inspector took good care to have them exterminated.

Tony died from his injuries before he had quite completed his story, and the true nativity of Eugenie La Verde was never known.

But her murderer was found and he was a serpent.

A visit to Goerck street revealed the fact that Morgan had made good his threat, and killed John, for he was found with a dirk in his heart, and evidence was adduced to prove that Morgan put it there.

Both he and Captain Philip subsequently paid the penalty of their crimes, the latter being given up to the tender mercies of Jersey justice.

The schooner and the retreat under the pier in South Brooklyn were both searched. The former was sold and the latter was filled with stones.

The murder of Eugenie La Verde was a mystery no longer, and the murderer, a serpent, died by a bullet from Nick Carter's revolver.

[THE END.]

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